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Subject: Draft of letter soliciting grant from HHMI for PLOS journal  
X-Priority: 1 (Highest)  
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From: pbrown@cmgm.stanford.edu

Please look over the attached letter and give me your comments as soon as possible. I really want to send this to Peter Bruns tomorrow if at all possible. Many of the budget entries are pure naive guesses, so please pay attention to these and if you have any relevant expertise please adjust them.

Pat

Dr. Peter Bruns  
Vice President  
HHMI

Dear Peter,

Here is a rough outline of our plans for establishing PLOS publications.  
The basic plan is to launch a group of new journals that will:

1. Publish scientific and scholarly papers online.
2. Provide the published papers with a license for free and unrestricted public distribution of the work, in any format, with the sole condition that redistribution or reproduction of any substantive part of a published work must include a proper and accurate citation of the authors and the original archival version. This will be achieved by means of a simple irrevocable license agreement, (which we are currently drafting- see attached draft), which will be signed by the responsible authors of the submitted work. The authors, at their discretion, can retain copyright or grant it to PLOS or to their institutions, but they must grant this irrevocable license for public use as a condition of publication.
3. Maintain high quality-control standards in editing and production.
4. Provide rigorous peer-review.
5. Archive the published papers as XML documents that conform to the PubMed Central DTD, so that conversion to new digital formats can be carried out by a single conversion script. (PMC has devoted a lot of effort to this archiving issue).
6. Distribute the published work to PubMed Central and other public distributors and repositories, including university libraries, etc.
7. Fund its operations by means of a combination of charges to authors, grant support from charitable organizations, Universities, and perhaps corporations who might benefit from freer access to the scientific literature.
8. Establish cooperative relationships with patient advocacy groups, disease-specific charities, physician and public education groups, etc., to develop public and patient education tools that draw on the publicly available scientific and scholarly articles.
9. Establish cooperative agreements with other publications that are committed to making the public record of scientific research a public resource (currently including PNAS, Mol. Biol of the Cell., Genome Biology, the BMC journals, and several others), providing for mirroring, interlinking, etc.

? (copy down)

for out/future

10. Post an open record of all business operations, so that our efforts can serve as an experiment in testing a new business model for scientific publication.

The details of the organization and business plan will evolve over the next two months and further evolve as we gain experience. One of the important reasons for asking for grant support now, is to give us a way to pay for the necessary assistance and advice in formulating and evolving this plan and setting up an operating system. Our current working business plan and proposed model for the journal operations is outlined below:

#### Journal organization and process flow:

Our current plan is for the family of journals to be called "Public Library of Science". Citation format will be, eg.: PLoS Genetics 2(1): 1-10. This provides a unique identifier for each paper for citation purposes, and the stratification into three layers will provide a rough measure of the peer-assessment of the significance and scope of the work. All papers will be given a unique citation in this format. However, through the authors' own assignment, together with the review and editorial assessment, the published work may actually appear in more than one of the online journals (as well as in third party journals that may choose to incorporate it, by virtue of its being licensed for free distribution).

The journals will be organized in a hierarchical fashion. Currently we envision 3 layers. The top layer, let's call it "PLOS New Science", will include articles that are deemed to be of the greatest interest or importance to the widest possible audience (articles that might otherwise be published, say, in Nature or Science). The second layer will consist of several discipline-specific journals, with titles like "PLOS Genetics", or "PLOS Chemistry" - we envision perhaps a dozen broad fields encompassing life sciences and medicine and allied natural sciences (eg. chemistry, psychology) - Although each article would be uniquely assigned to one of these journals for citation purposes, an article might actually be published (i.e. posted online) in more than one of these discipline-specific journals, if it is relevant, say, to both genetics and medicine. The third layer (with the working title "PLOS") will consist of a single journal title, comprising as many distinct subsections as warranted by the submission, and will publish papers that are more specialized, with correspondingly narrower expected audiences, and will also include, perhaps in a distinct section, the articles that the reviewers deem worth publishing, but of essentially archival value, or of interest only to very specialized audiences - eg. MPU's, confirmatory work of minor significance, brief case reports, etc.

The peer review process will aim to: 1. decide whether the work is scientifically rigorous, intellectually honest, and presented and written clearly enough to be useful to its intended audience. (i.e. decide whether this article deserves to be published anywhere at all). 2. Decide what audience would benefit from reading the article, a judgement that currently would amount to deciding which journal it belongs in. This decision is multifactorial and subjective, and based on the quality, importance, timeliness, the breadth of its implications, etc. This second decision will determine which "layer", and sometimes, which discipline-specific title, would be most appropriate.

Authors will be asked, when they submit their papers, to designate their

preference for one or more of the second tier journals, or to specify the archival journal if they believe that that is the appropriate venue for their work (eg., for case reports, brief specialized notes..). Direct submissions to the top layer journal will not be considered. The referees and editors will have the option of recommending a submitted paper for "promotion" either to from the second layer of field-specific journals to the top layer "New Science" journal, or from the third layer to the second layer. This recommendation will be considered and decided by the editors of the recipient journal.

Our practical agenda in the next few of weeks includes:

1. Establish a non-profit corporation called the Public Library of Science. (We've already begun this process, reserving the name for a non-profit org to be incorporated in California, and we plan to have this done within a week).
2. Organize, via a telephone tree model, several hundred committed volunteer scientists to commit time to setting up an editorial infrastructure for the journal, advising us on the design and operation of the journal, and recruiting their friends and colleagues to help and support the journal. 20
3. Work with these volunteers to establish an editorial system and appoint editorial boards for each of the journals.
4. Hire a managing editor with experience. (We have a candidate already)
5. Hire a full time administrative assistant.
6. Retain one or more legal advisors with experience in non-profit organizations and copyright/publishing issues (we will presumably need a few dozen hours of legal advice along the way).
7. Retain business advisors to review our business plan and advise us on accounting.
8. Retain a graphic designer to advise us on developing the look of the journal and help us prepare posters, etc. for our grass roots advertising campaign.
9. Begin a grass roots advertising campaign to build confidence and interest in PLOS and to establish a name and presence. The basic idea will be to use email to send out poster images that supporters at every institution can print out and post widely at their local institutions. Since this is a grass-roots, scientists' initiative, we are in a unique position to call on our supporters to advertise for us, as we have successfully done with the open letter (unlike any ordinary start-up journal, which can't call on thousands of supporters to do its advertising).

Budget (for first year):

#### A. Fixed infrastructure costs

##### 1. Personnel:

Position	Salary and Benefits
Managing Editor	\$120,000
Administrative Assistant	\$ 50,000
(Copy editors x 2)	\$100,000

##### 2. Consultants:

Legal assistance	\$ 20,000
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Business and marketing consultants	\$ 20,000
Graphic Design	\$ 10,000
Accountant	\$ 5,000
3. Miscellaneous Fees	
Licenses	\$ 2,000
Telephone bills	\$ 2,000
Insurance	\$ 2,000
4. Equipment	
Computers/internet server/printers/software	\$ 40,000
5. Office expenses	
Office supplies	\$ 10,000
Mail	\$ 10,000
6. Promotional costs	\$ 10,000
7. Travel	\$ 10,000
Grand Total:	\$411,000

B. Operating costs depending on throughput: Contractor costs for converting submitted manuscripts into properly-formatted XML documents are estimated to be approximately \$200 per published paper. We are soliciting quotations from several potential providers of this service. We intend to recover these costs through a combination of charges to authors and subsidies from grants, which we will solicit from foundations (like HHMI, Gates, Wellcome, SPARC, MooreÉ), Universities and research libraries, public sources and private corporations. We believe that we can keep the author charges competitive with other journals (for comparison, ASM charges \$75-151 per published page, for an average of more than \$500 per published paper). It would be helpful to have an initial grant to serve as a buffer so that we can keep the charges as close as possible to the break-even rate without running the risk of going bankrupt. I would estimate that we will receive at least 1,000 and perhaps 10,000 submissions. This would correspond to expenses of \$200,000 to \$2,000,000. If we approach the higher figure, this will mean that the enterprise is succeeding sufficiently well that we will have some latitude to increase the author charges if needed to balance the books. I have written to David Shulenberg a draft proposal for a system of subsidies by Universities to encourage public-domain publishing initiatives, by offering to cover author charges incurred in publishing in peer-reviewed scholarly journals that make the published work available in the public domain. I would welcome your opinions and suggestions on this proposal.

An important issue to resolve is how we will handle copy editing. One idea that we are exploring is to have the organized groups of librarians that support this initiative to offer to provide in-kind support in the form of copy-editing assistance. Alternatively, we may have to hire permanent staff to handle this responsibility, and cover the costs with additional author charges.

Space: (for the time being, I will find unused office space in Stanford to house the operation).

Financial management: We propose to keep our financial records open, and post them online so that they can serve as a resource for other

publishers who might wish to consider this business model. We will hire an independent accountant to audit our financial records on an annual basis and post the report online.

Grant Proposal: We could confidently embark on our first year of operation with a total grant of \$650,000. This would cover our operating expenses, and provide a buffer totaling about \$240,000 for publication costs. This represents a small fraction of the amount that HHMI spends on subsidies to libraries, and I believe that given the extremely strong support that this initiative has received from research librarians (you can talk to David Shulenberg (provost of the University of Kansas and a leading advocate for research libraries), Mary Case, or Alison Buckholtz to get a perspective from research librarians about this initiative. If this amount is more than HHMI is willing to grant, then any grant of a portion of this amount would be gratefully accepted, although this will mean that we will need to devote a correspondingly larger amount of our time and effort to securing additional funds, and will make it harder to establish a credible business for attracting additional support.



Proposal\_to\_Peter\_Bruns.rtf

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HHMI

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